



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Yellowstone National Park
Cheryl Matthews, (307) 344-2010

Grand Teton National Park
Anzelmo or Skaggs
307 739-3415 or 739-3393

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National Park Service
David Barna, (202) 208-6843

Yellowstone/Grand Teton News Release

Park Service Announces Temporary Winter Use Plans *Finding of No Significant Impact Approved*

The National Park Service today approved winter use plans for Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway that provides visitors with a range of winter recreational opportunities for a three-year period while protecting park resources. A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Temporary Winter Use Plans Environment Assessment ensures that park resources are protected and allows for the use of snowmobiles and snowcoaches in the parks on roads that automobiles use in the summer.

The FONSI, which ensures access and protection of resources, was approved by National Park Service Intermountain Regional Director Steve Martin on November 4, 2004. The plan will be in effect for the next three winter seasons, allowing snowmobile and snowcoach use through the winter of 2006-2007. A final rule implementing the decision will soon be published in the *Federal Register*.

Under the decision and the implementing rule, 720 snowmobiles per day will be allowed to enter Yellowstone, all led by commercial guides. This is substantially below the historic peak day use levels in the park and is lower than the level of access allowed during the last half of the 2003-2004 winter seasons. Commercial guides will not be required for the 140 snowmobiles per day allowed in Grand Teton National Park.

“In 2000, the Clinton administration had developed a plan to eliminate snowmobile use in these parks,” said Fran Mainella, Director of the National Park Service. “I commend the Park Service employees for coming up with an environmentally friendly, common-sense approach to winter use management that incorporates the use of cleaner and quieter snowmobile technology that reduces hydrocarbon emissions by at least 90 percent. For 40 years families have had the opportunity to access the parks by snowmobiles and we want to continue to make a variety of winter activities available to American families.”

Snowmobiles in Yellowstone will continue to operate on roads used by automobiles during the summer months. Snowmobiles will continue to be prohibited on specific side roads in Yellowstone including the Fountain Flat Road, Virginia Cascades Drive, North Canyon Rim Drive, Riverside Drive and the road from Canyon Junction to Washburn Hot Springs Overlook. Snowmobiles will be allowed on the Lake Butte Road; and the Firehole Canyon Drive will be open to snowcoaches only from 7 a.m. to 12 p.m. and to snowmobiles and snowcoaches from 12 p.m. to 9 p.m. each day.

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A total of 40 snowmobiles daily will be allowed on the frozen surface of Jackson Lake for purposes of ice fishing only; a valid Wyoming state fishing license and the proper fishing gear will be required. Snowplane use will continue to be prohibited on the lake.

All recreational snowmobiles entering Yellowstone National Park will be required to be four-stroke machines that meet the cleaner, quieter National Park Service (NPS) “Best Available Technology” (BAT) standards. A list of NPS-approved BAT snowmobiles is available on the park’s web site at www.nps.gov/yell/planvisit/winteruse.

BAT snowmobiles will be required in Grand Teton National Park, with the exception of a short segment of the Continental Divide Snowmobile Trail (between Moran Junction and the east park boundary) and those originating in the Targhee National Forest and traveling on the Grassy Lake Road as far as Flagg Ranch.

The temporary winter use management plan is a balanced approach that ensures that resources are protected, provides access and gives visitors, employees and residents of the park’s gateway communities the information they want and need to plan for the near term, and will help minimize economic impacts.

Monitoring data gathered during the interim plan will be invaluable in accurately assessing the impact of winter use in the long-term analysis and developing a permanent regulation for winter use in the parks.

The FONSI and EA are available online at <http://www.nps.gov/yell/planvisit/winteruse/winteruse-ea.htm>. A limited number of printed copies may be requested by calling Yellowstone National Park at (307) 344-2013.

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